

PRESENTATION OF
THE ACADEMY PLAQUE TO
MARY ANN PAYNE, M.D.*

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I HAVE MANY REASONS TO BE GRATEFUL to this Academy. In my early years I came here and I attended conferences, participated in all of the activities, looked at great leaders in medicine with adoration, lapsed for a while, and then, a few years ago, once again, was given the opportunity to participate in the life of the Academy and became one of the officers of the institution. I found all of this exciting and informative and rewarding and I am grateful, as all of us in medicine should be, for the existence of this Academy and the opportunity that it presents to us. The thing that I am most grateful for and that I want to share with you tonight is the pleasure that I have had working with and beside that remarkable woman, Mary Ann Payne.

Dr. Payne has had a long and distinguished career as a physician in this city. She is Clinical Professor Emerita of Medicine at Cornell University Medical College and an attending physician at New York Hospital. She was the 63rd president of this Academy and the first woman to serve in that position. The very fact that she was able to overcome the conservatism of this body in matters of leadership indicates what a powerful, impressive figure she is. While that glass ceiling keeps them from most chairmanships, women are gaining positions of power and influence in medicine everywhere. Last week I, and I presume some of you, saw and heard a new editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, Dr. Marcia Angell, debating one of the most important health issues of our day with another woman, Dr. June Osborne, chairman of the President's National Commission on AIDS. I was personally impressed with Dr. Angell's lucid presentation of a sound, humane policy for the broadening of testing for HIV status among patients and professionals. I must say to you that I have already found out this evening that that view of mine of Dr. Angell's marvelous performance does not stand unchallenged. Nonethe-

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less, this is clearly a woman of substance. I was enormously impressed with her coolness, her demeanor, her articulation. She's a woman prepared to take controversial stands. Her tenure as editor should be exciting.

As I watched Dr. Angell with pleasure and pride I recognized that what I was seeing was a slightly younger version of Mary Ann Payne: a professional who I have seen time and again in the past five years put in the time, energy, and labor to understand the issues; a person who respected tradition but was not paralyzed by it; a person whose goal was to search for what was right and decent and best for the society she has so long and ably served; a person who, once she determined that there was a clear path to be followed, was inexorable in seeing it through to the finish. When I talk of Mary Ann I'm reminded of a quote from another impressive woman, Helen Keller, who said: "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing." Mary Ann seeks out adventure. I love to listen to her stories of journeys in search of excitement; I think some of them frightened me a little bit. When she was describing the nature of the double or triple hulled boat that she had to be in last year to go into the Antarctic, I was glad to hear about it in a warm place. One year she went to Tierra del Fuego and spent her vacation banding penguins. The expedition had a scientific purpose of course. The place where these particular penguins chose to nest was known, but after raising their chicks, they set off across those cold southern seas for an unknown destination. Through banding they could be tracked, a worthy objective which involved Mary Ann in weeks of battle with birds who were strong, uncooperative, and very ill-tempered in one of the rockiest, most desolate, wind swept coasts known to unhappy mariners. If I could have passed on some of the information about Mary Ann that I had to those penguins, they would have come peaceably, because come they were going to. You can see that she likes adventure and struggle.

All of her life she has worked hard toward her goals. After graduation from college in the middle of the Great Depression she taught high school for four years before going on to the University of Wisconsin for an M.A. and a Ph.D. in endocrinology, and finally an M.D. from Cornell. Mary Ann brought that same sense of dedicated labor coupled with enthusiasm and daring to her presidency of this Academy. During her tenure she led the Academy through the most profound change this body has undergone since we moved into this building in the 1920s. Working with our then director, William Stubing, Mary Ann guided us through the difficult and hazardous process of rethinking our mission and our organizational structure. The two of them shared a sense of high moral purpose, a selfless devotion to the welfare of the Academy and its members which gave them the strength and the ability to persuade their constituents to follow them on the path to the future. The organizational changes have taken place. The Academy is now in a strong position to accept and fulfill its fundamental responsibilities of leadership around the great health issues which face the city.

At a dinner in January of 1987 new officers of the Academy were welcomed. I was among the number. Mary Ann spoke words to us then that are even truer today. She said: "Institutions have lives of their own and timing is equally important for their effectiveness. Today medicine is in a state of turmoil. Its forces are in disarray and it is beset on all sides by political and social changes that threaten to destroy professionalism. The Academy is in a unique position. It has no special favor to ask and it is not defending some provincial fiefdom. The Academy gathers the thoughts and opinions of the best minds in medicine, and we certainly have them in the Fellowship of the Academy, and in this city, state, and country. The voice of the Academy must be clearly heard now in these troubled times speaking for the very best in our profession." I trust that the members of The New York Academy of Medicine will always be ready to accept Mary Ann's call to great adventure and to great debate.